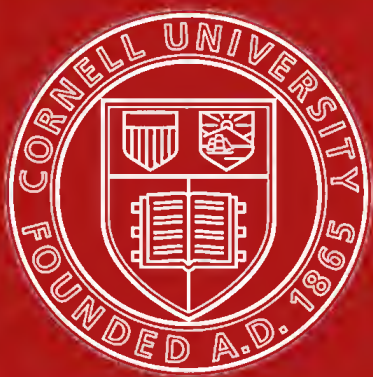


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THE KANISHKA CASKET INSCRIPTIONS.

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THE KANISHKA CASKET INSCRIPTIONS.

THE very admirable impressions which Mr. Marshall has made of the inscriptions on the lid and sides of the Kanishka casket found at Shāh-jī-kī-Ḍhērī in March 1909 are here published for the first time, for the benefit of those who wish to compare the originals with the transcripts and translations which I have previously published elsewhere.¹

The writing is everywhere rendered in series of faint and minute dots, which made the preparation of facsimiles an exceptionally difficult and delicate task, which, however, Mr. Marshall has managed to achieve with the splendid results here shown. (Plates LII and LIII.) The excellent photograph of the casket, with the coin found near it and the crystal reliquary contained in it, which held the few fragments of bone which were the Buddha Relics, is also published here, in order to render this paper a self-contained record of the epigraphs. For the photograph as well as for the impressions my acknowledgments are due to Mr. Marshall.

The writing itself is in the cursive script of the Kharōshthī alphabet, the individual *aksharas* measuring about $\frac{3}{16}$ " to $\frac{3}{8}$ " in height. In form they are clearly later than the characters of the Taxila copper-plate of Patika, which are also dotted, and a pronounced tendency is noticeable toward a flourish to the left at the bottom of all letters permitting of this addition. This flourish resembles the *u*-vowel as written in the Kharōshthī of the oldest period, but confusion is avoided by indicating the real *u* by a definitely closed loop.

The language is a consciously Sanskritizing form of Prākṛit, witness the genitives *Sarvastivadina*[*m*] and *Sarvasatvana*[*m*] side by side with the compound *hidasuhartham*; but possibly the conventional or stereotyped nature of the formulæ may explain the strongly Sanskritic form which these brief epigraphs show. One feels that it verges on correct Sanskrit.

As regards the interpretation of the inscriptions I have little or nothing to add to my previously published remarks, but I nevertheless reprint my readings here for convenience of reference, mentioning a few points where possible emendations have occurred to me.

¹ Cf. *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, Frontier Circle*, for 1908-09, pp. 19 and 20, and *A. S. R.* for 1908-09, pp. 51 ff. Cf. also *J. R. A. S.* for 1909, p. 1058.

OLIN The first of the four (*cf.* Plate LII, figure *b*), which is found on the top of
 PK the lid, running across the petals of the full-blown lotus with which this surface is decorated, I read:—

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Acharyana[m] Sarvastivadina[m] parigrahe.

S74++ This may be rendered, "For the acceptance (or, as the property) of the Doctors of the school of Sarvāstivādins." At first I thought the first *akshara* of the last word was certainly *pra*, but I am less sure of this now, and no longer feel warranted in representing the original as a mistaken writing. The whole is of course a familiar formula, calling for no special remark. Nor need we perhaps be surprised at finding the dedication of Kanishka's Buddha Relics addressed to a sect of the Hīnayāna, since the authorities are agreed that the codification at the Council of Kanishka was in accordance with the doctrine of the Sarvāstivādins, and Hiuen-Tsang specifically mentions the fact that even in his time the priests living in Kanishka's monastery adjoining the great *stūpa* of Peshāwar followed the Little Vehicle.¹

But, with Kanishka's adherence to the Hīnayāna so abundantly proved, it is difficult to follow Mr. Vincent Smith's argument that the occurrence on Kanishka's coins of the Buddha figure in the midst of a crowd of heterogeneous deities is due to the prevalence of Mahāyānism.²

Kanishka's conception of Buddhism appears certainly to have been the conception of the Sarvāstivāda school, and that this school belonged to the Hīnayāna is established.³ It is, however, undoubtedly surprising, if this is so, that the tradition of Kanishka's Council should have been so completely forgotten among the Hīnayānists in the south, and knowledge of it have been preserved only among those northern nations where the Mahāyāna predominates. How is it, in fact, that a self-acknowledged Hīnayānist has become the hero of the Mahāyāna schools? Perhaps the explanation of the seeming paradox is to be found in the lack of really important differences between the two at that early age, and particularly among the largely un-Indian peoples of the North-West Frontier. Even to-day the Hindus of the Peshāwar valley would seem hopelessly lax to the stricter Brahmans of Benares, and in all probability even the Hīnayāna of Gandhāra would have seemed unorthodox to the old assemblies of Magadha; while possibly the currency of the Kanishka tradition in the north may have been due to geographical rather than sectarian causes in the first instance.

The second inscription (*cf.* Plate LIII, fig. *a*), which occurs between the figures of the flying geese in the band decorating the lower edge of the lid, is unfortunately illegible now, as the metal here is more corroded than anywhere else, and the surface has peeled off in several places. A few individual *aksharas* can be traced with some

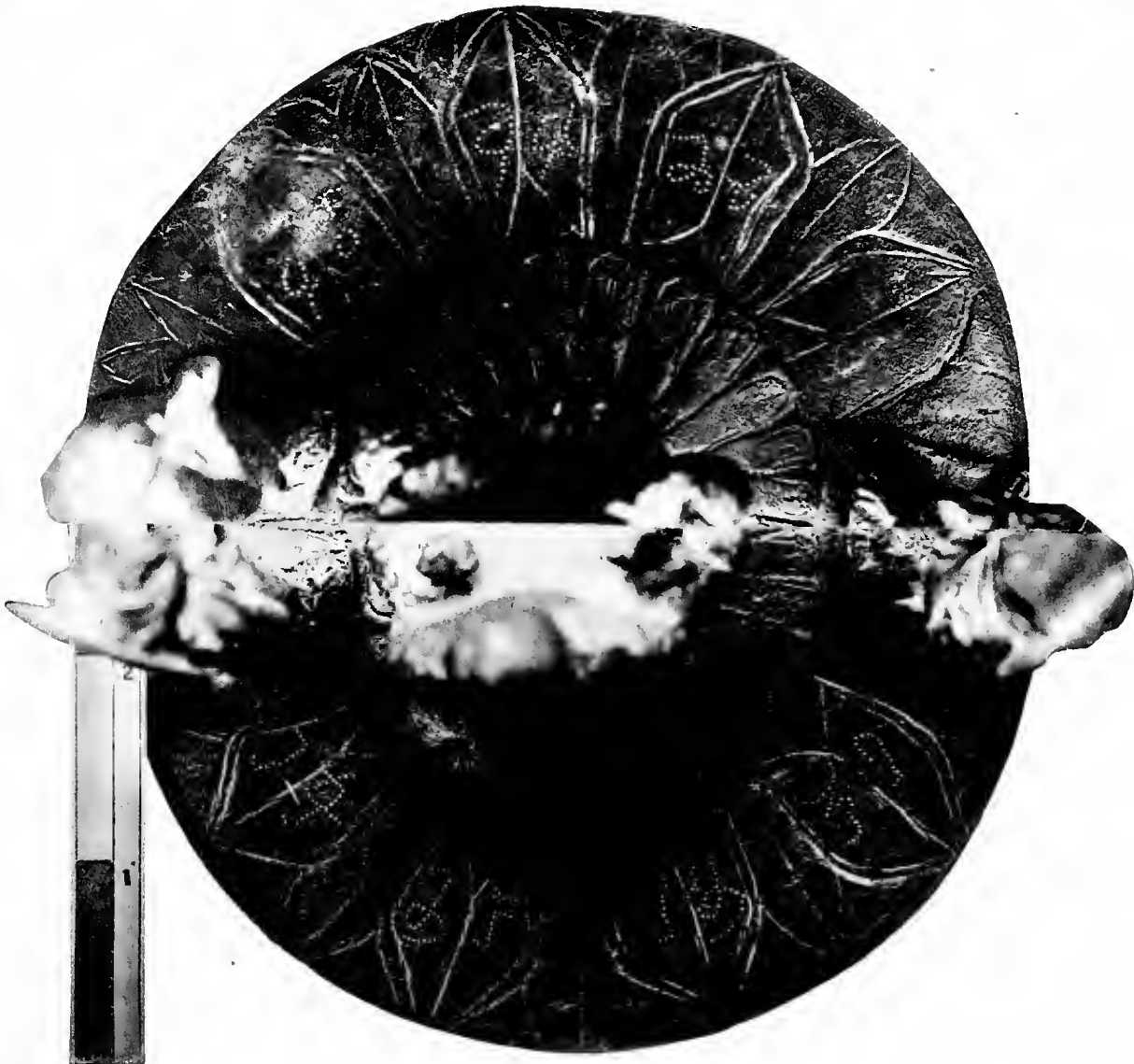
¹ *Cf.* Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Vol. I, p. 104.

² *Cf.* V. A. Smith, *Early History of India*, 1st ed., p. 233, 2nd ed., p. 248.

³ *Cf.* Takakusu's introduction to I-Tsing's *Record of the Buddhist Religion*, pp. 21ff. The remark by I-Tsing (p. 14) where, in speaking of the various sects he says "in other places some practise in accordance with one, some with the other," might have led one to think that possibly the Peshāwar body of Sarvāstivādins were Mahāyānists after all, but the testimony of Hiuen-Tsang that Kanishka's monastery followed the Little Vehicle removes all doubt on this point.



(a) BRONZE CASKET, CRYSTAL RELIQUARY AND COIN.



(b) INSCRIPTION NO. 1.

degree of certainty, and, when I had the original before me, I thought I could detect traces of three connected characters, *ka*, *na*, and *shka*; but the facsimile does not permit even this hypothetical reading. I must therefore leave this one of the inscriptions quite untouched.

The third epigraph (*cf.* Plate LIII, fig. *b*) is found on the main body of the casket, between the heads of the figures in the principal frieze, and, as can be seen from the impression here published, is in the main readable with certainty as follows:—

deyadharmo sarvasatvana [ṁ]¹ hidasuhartham bhavatu.

This is another well-known formula and signifies, “May this pious gift redound to the welfare and happiness of all creatures.”—No doubt can attach to the majority of the *aksharas* here, and the only points calling for special mention are the peculiar forms of certain conjuncts. In Bühler’s Tables the form given for *rma* is evidently the same in essentials as we have it here, with the addition of an oblique stroke on the left. The precise value of this I am somewhat doubtful about. But it is obviously intentional, and apparently meant for a vowel stroke, and for these reasons I venture to read the symbol as *rmo*. I should note, though, that I can find no other instance where the stroke for *o* is added at this angle, which, indeed, appears to be an exact reversal of the usual inclination. A vowel mark which is almost identical with this occurs in connection with a *ya* on the lion capital at Mathurā, and with *ya* is registered by Bühler as representing *e*. But the absence of other nominatives in *e* in these casket inscriptions, as well as the strong Sanskritization noticeable both lead me to prefer the reading *o*, despite the incorrect *sandhi* involved. One wonders if the unusual position of the stroke may not perhaps be due to the shape of the *akshara* itself. The irregularity of the *e* with *ya* certainly is attributable to this cause, and a further analogous instance is seen in the way the *i*-vowel is written across the *akshara* *hi* in the word *hidasuhartham* of our epigraph. Another interesting comparison is the *tva* which is different in form to that shown by Bühler. I confess that the constituent elements in this complex are not at all clear to me, but there can be no doubt as to the reading. Neither can I reduce to its elements the symbol for *rtham*; the difference between it and the form for *thra* which Bühler gives, may be due to an intention of indicating the *anusvāra* by a kind of subscript². On this assumption I have transcribed the *akshara* as *rtham*, but unfortunately I have not been able to find any exact parallel to it. Of the single consonants attention may perhaps be called to the *ya* and the *dha* in the first word, as the former shows the late square form of this letter which so closely resembles a *śa*, while the latter is more compactly written, and at the same time more angular, than any of the symbols for *dh* registered by Bühler. None of the other

¹ Sir Aurel Stein notes, apropos of the *ṁ* I supply: “I think the remnant of a small curve to the left at the foot of the character *na* can be made out in the original. This would represent the *anusvāra* *ṁ*.”

² To Sir Aurel Stein, again, I am indebted for the following note:—“The indication of the *anusvāra* by a curve to the left, or, in the case of certain letters which have no stem, by a small crescent placed below the letter, is quite a common feature in my Kharōshthī documents on wood and leather from Niya, etc. See Rapson on the *Alphabet of Kharōshthī Documents*, etc., in *Actes du XIV Congrès Internat. des Orientalistes*, Vol. I, 1905, pp. 5, 11. Also various plates with such records in *Ancient Khotan*, and *Boyer Journal Asiatique*, 1905, pp. 464 ff.”

aksharas present any variations of interest from the usual type, and apart from the question of the *o* in *deyadharmo*, and the *anusvāra* in *rtham* the reading of the whole inscription may be called certain. About its meaning, of course, there is no doubt whatever.

And now we come to the last and most important of the four epigraphs (*cf.* Plate LII, fig. *c*), namely, the one incised in the level spaces between the feet of the figures in the main frieze on the body of the casket. Here, very unfortunately, two or three difficulties do arise, and this is why the impressions are published, at Dr. Vogel's wise suggestion, in order that other scholars may satisfy themselves as to the correctness or otherwise of my interpretation. My own reading of the line is:

*dasa agisala navakarmi (k)anishkasa vihare mahasenasa saṅgharame,*¹

and my original translation, by which I still abide, ran,

"The slave Agisalaos, the Superintendent of Works at the Vihāra of Kanishka in the monastery of Mahāsēna."

In defence of this rendering let me note the following. The word *vihare* I understand to refer to the great monument which we now call the "*stūpa*" of Kanishka, where the casket was found, but which from the account given by Hiuen-Tsang certainly appears to have partaken more of the nature of a temple or pagoda than any actual *stūpa* which has been preserved to us; witness the repeated references to its many stories and the legend of the robbers who "wished to go in and steal."² This would certainly seem to imply an inner chamber in the monument (which may indeed have been as a whole not altogether dissimilar to the great temple or tower at Bōdh-Gayā), and the designation of it as a *vihāra* would thus be perfectly correct. According to Fa Hien there seem to have been many such *vihāras* in this district, each containing some object traditionally associated with the Buddha, which it is clear from the accounts given must have been more in the nature of temples or towers than actual *stūpas*. Assuming therefore, that Kanishka's *vihāra* was one of this number, I understand the present inscription to be, as it were, the signature³ of the officer in charge of its construction for Kanishka, and I take it that this new pagoda was originally built at or near an older foundation then known as Mahāsēna's Monastery. Of Mahāsēna or his monastery nothing is known, but it may readily be supposed that the latter was a smaller and humbler structure than ultimately proved necessary for the accommodation of the large body of priests brought together by the king, and that it then gave way before the larger monastery which the Chinese pilgrims found associated with Kanishka's name, and portions of which we have now recovered. No other interpretation seems possible nor need any other be sought, since nothing here assumed is contrary, either to the facts as we know them, or to inherent probability.

¹ Sir Aurel Stein notes, in regard to the initial of this word: "Is not this character to be read *saṁ* with subscribed *anusvāra*? This nasalization of the vowel before nasal consonant is a regular feature in the Kharōshthī documents on wood from Niya. See Rapson, *loc. cit.*, pp. 81, 12 (e. g. *vimāṇavāṇi*, *pumṇa*, etc.)."

² Beal, *op. cit.*, Volume 1, p. 103.

³ Against this interpretation of the epigraph, Dr. Venis urges the absence of a verb; but in the endorsement on the Taxila plate of Patika the phrase is simply *Patikasa chhatrapa Liaka*, see *Ep. Ind.*, Vol. IV, p. 56.



(a) INSCRIPTION NO. 2.



(b) INSCRIPTION NO. 3.



(c) INSCRIPTION NO. 4.

The minutiae of the reading, however, are unfortunately less certain than the general purport of the whole. To begin with, the first word, *dasa*, which I take to be = *dāsa* = *slave*, is so curiously spaced that doubt as to the correctness of the reading is legitimate; nay, more, in the impression now before me I almost seem to detect traces of dots between the *da* and the *sa*, which were not visible to me on the original, so that there is at least a possibility that the first word contained three syllables instead of two. But I am by no means sure that these dots do actually occur. I assumed originally that the lines faintly traceable at this point were ornamental streamers depending from the frieze, as is certainly the case with the curious zigzags in the second space and at various other points throughout the inscription, and it may well be that this is actually the case. At all events, no third *akshara* is sufficiently visible for me to suggest even a hypothetical reading for it, and I am therefore constrained to abide by my former reading as by far the most probable, to my own mind at least. The next difficulty to note, if difficulty it be, is the initial letter of the second word, which I have read as *Agiśala*, and interpreted, with Mr. Marshall's help, as the Greek name *Agisalaos*. In older *Kharōshthī* this *akshara* would certainly be read as *u*; but, despite the conspicuous flourish to the left at the bottom of the letter, there is no doubt, so far as I can see, that the vowel actually intended is a simple *a*; for elsewhere throughout these inscriptions even elaborate flourishes like this are manifestly decorative and wholly without phonetic significance, while on the other hand a real *u* is clearly marked by a closed loop. The difficulty here, therefore, may fairly be called more apparent than real, and the reading *Agiśala* may stand with confidence. The next point is the initial letter in the following word. It is perhaps barely possible that the *n* here is not dental but cerebral. But since cerebralization would be incorrect, and the apparent length of the hook to the right may be due to the ornamental zigzag which here comes in from above to obscure the writing, I prefer to assume that the dental is intended, as it should be. The following *akshara*, *va*, is clear enough, and I do not think the succeeding *ka* will be challenged, but the next complex is not so clear. It seems to me, though, that there can be no reasonable doubt but what we have here a repetition of the curious *akshara* in the third epigraph which I have read as *rmo*, with the difference that here the vowel stroke crosses the main line, *i.e.*, is here the vowel *i* instead of the vowel *o* as above. In this way I arrived originally at my reading *navakarmi* for the whole word, and I see no reason to alter this reading now, despite the very real difficulty in assuming the form *navakarmi* instead of the much more usual and indeed common form *navakarmika*.¹ The difficulty is of course increased by the fact that I do see, or think I see, a *ka* as the initial of the following word, the important proper name *Kanishkasa*. But this *ka*, it must be confessed at once, is

¹ The word *navakamika* occurs in the following inscriptions:—*Sōnārī* Stūpa railing inscription, *cf.* Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes* p. 313, Pl. XXIII, 8; *Barhut* railing inscription now, in the Indian Museum, *cf.* Hultzsch, *Ind. Ant.*, Vol. XXI, p. 233, No. 76; *Kanheri* cave inscription, *cf.* *Archl. Survey, W. India*, Vol. V, p. 75 f., No. 4, Pl. LI. In the form *navakamaka* in *Amarāvātī* sculpture inscription, *cf.* Hultzsch, *Z.D.M.G.* Vol. XL, p. 346, No. 53; and in the form *navakarmiga*, in the *Manikāla* inscription, *cf.* *J.R.A.S.* for 1909, pp. 645 ff.—[Ed.]

